



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

### XIII. SOUTHEY'S LATER RADICALISM

Carlyle tells us in his *Reminiscences* that, when *Wat Tyler* made its unlucky appearance in 1817, he with other radicals "cackled and triumphed" over Southey "as over a slashed and well-slain foe to us and mankind." A few years later, however, he read *Joan of Arc*, *Thalaba*, and *The Curse of Kehama* with kindlier feeling, thought them "full of soft pity, like the wailings of a mother, yet with a clang of chivalrous valor finely audible too." From that time on he watched for Southey's writings, especially his *Quarterly* articles, as for things of value; "in spite of my Radicalism, I found very much in these Toryisms which was greatly according to my heart; things rare and worthy, at once pious and true, which were always welcome to me."

What was there in Southey's Toryism which Carlyle, calling himself a radical, could thus approve? The answer to this question is possibly not without interest to the curious. Southey was throughout his life keenly interested in observing the facts of human living, and in speculating upon their causes and the means of controlling them. This interest in what we should call economics and sociology was, of course, stimulated by his early reading of such writers as Rousseau, Adam Smith, Godwin, Brissot de Warville, and others. and it showed itself in his ardor for pantisocracy and revolution. Yet that ardor was but the youthful flare of an interest which he carried over into his maturity, into his copious erudition, and especially into his acquaintance and extensive correspondence with such varied persons as his old schoolmate Wynn of the House of Commons, Rickman the statistician and census-taker, the reformer Robert Owen, and Andrew Bell the educator. Opportunity for the expression of such interest, finally, came to Southey in the necessity he was under during forty years of writing for the reviews, first the *Critical*, the *Annual*, and the *Edinburgh Annual*

*Register*, and then from 1809 to 1839 the *Quarterly*. Out of his contributions to these publications might be compiled a work in several volumes giving a fairly complete social as well as literary history of the English people. Beginning with the reign of Henry VIII, it would include a full discussion of the revolution in France and of contemporary changes in England together with chapters on Ireland, foreign parts of the British Empire, and the United States. The immediate purpose of these writings was to oppose political change at home, but the larger purpose was to enforce a point of view toward the problems of English society, a social philosophy admittedly and radically opposed to that which prevailed at the time. This broader aspect of his thought Southey had so much at heart that he attempted to give it permanent literary form in his *Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society* in 1829, and in 1832 republished from the reviews certain of his more important statements as *Essays Moral and Political*. The impression made on the public by this enormous body of able, learned, earnest writing on important matters is melancholy to reflect upon. In what Southey said Carlyle saw piety, sympathy, and a measure of truth, but Macaulay was nearer to the common notion in dismissing most of it as preposterous and the man himself as one too often ruled by the feeling "I do well to be angry." Carlyle could be angry too, but the anger of Southey, a thin, shrill man, though no less hot, was far less impressive, not titanic but almost feminine. What in Carlyle, therefore, was a kind of strength was in Southey a fault of temper which helped to earn for him a reputation which neither his character nor his opinions wholly deserved.

The structure of Southey's thought on society and the state had become clear by 1797, and remained simple and consistent. Consequently his opinions, reiterated often in almost identical phrases and developed with great particularity, can fairly be considered briefly as a whole. Their basis will be most easily understood if we remember that in 1793 Southey "read and almost worshipped" Godwin's

*Political Justice* and that the theory of that book has two distinct aspects. Godwin advances a conception of individual motive and will which he calls the doctrine of "necessity." By this notion Southey seems never to have been as deeply impressed as Coleridge was, and like others soon dismissed it as contrary to common sense and common charity. Godwin's theory as to the nature or content of individual purpose in society had a more lasting influence upon him. This notion was that the rational being acts, not as was commonly supposed, in accordance with self-interest, but in the interest of society. Welfare, Godwin argued, did not flow from undisturbed self-seeking, but from individual endeavor to find and to satisfy social rather than immediate personal need. That man did not best serve the general interest who pursued his own, but he most surely secured his own who forgot it in the interest of others. These considerations led Godwin to his striking definition of the rights of property, anticipating most of the concepts of nineteenth century social radicalism. In this he lays down the principle that the claim rising from need to the use and possession of anything takes precedence first over the right to property derived from conquest or legal title, and then over the right of the workman to the whole produce of his labor. The satisfaction of need, according to Godwin, was the paramount duty of all society, and to the possibility of satisfying need in the broadest sense of the word no limit whatever existed except such as men, by not willing to remove, permitted to continue.

This conception of the abstract relation of property to need was, as the author said, the keystone of *Political Justice*. It is in his book much weakened and made ridiculous by Godwin's many extravagances and eccentricities of illustration and application. To these Southey gave small heed, but to the fundamental idea of the infinite possibilities of human progress through direct human effort and the subordination of private to public interest, in a word, to the idea of the perfectibility of man and society through joint endeavor,

Southey brought an abiding faith religious in its intensity. In the midst of his Jacobinism, consequently, he was still a reformer; in the midst of his Toryism he was still a good deal of a radical. The result is that, considering the time in which he lived, he generally appears, like Godwin himself, to be arguing up the wind. Such a man, at any rate after the Napoleonic debacle of revolution in France, could have small hope of the political reforms then being urged upon England. He could have only abhorrence for the whole doctrine of *laissez faire*, assuming, as it did, that the law of nature required each man to look out for himself and the hindmost to take the consequences with pious resignation. Such a man, finally, was necessarily in disagreement with the later radical theories of the class struggle and the ultimate ascendancy of the proletariat. Southey, therefore, was quite naturally driven into becoming a Tory, but a Tory with this difference, that in the possibility of persuading the powerful to use their power immediately and directly for the satisfaction of need, for the relief and amelioration of the people, he saw the only hope of progress, or even of safety, for England.

It has often enough been recalled that Southey wrote foolish verses for George III and his son; let it also be recorded that the Tory laureate urged the ministers of the Georges to attack those evil consequences of the industrial revolution for which even democracies have not yet found a complete remedy. "I have pleaded," he wrote in 1832, "against the growing errors of the times; not more earnestly opposing evil designs, and perilous experiments upon our social system, than urging those efficient measures, and those only real and radical reforms, by which it can be supported." This position he first stated fully in two articles on the state of the poor written for the *Quarterly* in 1809 and 1816. In these and subsequent utterances Southey argued that the great economic changes then taking place were having social results which must be met by changes equally great in social policy. He admitted that the age was one of vastly

increasing activity, enterprise, and power, but it was also one of increasing private greed, loose principle, ignorance, vice, poverty, wretchedness, and political insecurity. The essay of 1816 discussed in particular the state of the agricultural population. It pointed out that enclosures, new methods of cultivation, consolidation of farms, had made of agriculture merely "a branch of great commercial speculation" with a resulting gain to landowners and a loss to the people. The notion of the economists that the greatest benefactor of the species was the man who made two blades of grass grow where but one grew before was false. To be sure hedgerows had been straightened, furrows lengthened, fields made handsomer, corn more and weeds less abundant, pork and mutton fatter, beeves better bred, but men had at the same time been made immeasurably worse and poorer. The agricultural worker was no longer an independent human being but a day laborer, no longer a happy peasant but a pauper. He was being driven away from the homes of his fathers to the great manufacturing towns where, old habits and associations broken, he rapidly degenerated.

In the manufacturing system Southey recognized great possibilities of usefulness, but for the use which had been made of it he had only condemnation. Through the employment of women and children, through the mechanical nature of the work, through long hours, poor and uncertain pay, and the conditions of life in factory towns, it served to brutalize the poor. They became the victims of the vicious circle of speculative trade—of the fatal round of selfish competition in the exploitation of foreign markets, of the resultant feverish activity and factitious prosperity, of overproduction, and then of deflation, unemployment, poverty, and disaffection. Such conditions, he argues, were not inconsistent with the increase of gross wealth, but the difficulty was that the manufacturing system tended to collect rather than to diffuse wealth. "Where wealth is successfully employed in the speculations of trade," he says in the *Colloquies*, "its increase is in proportion to its amount;

great capitalists become like pikes in a fishpond, who devour the weaker fish; and it is but too certain that the poverty of one part of the people seems to increase in the same ratio as the riches of another."

Hence comes the insecurity of England. Governments, he repeats, founded upon manufactures sleep upon gunpowder. The manufacturing poor, removed from the stabilizing influence of local attachments, exacerbated by their monotonous mechanical occupation, not being machines, may become brutes, miserable, ignorant, discontented, angry, dangerous. Selfish interests promote the danger. From their cheerless kennels the poor turn to the warm refuge of the pothouse, and there the demagogue and the cheap newspaper feed upon the disaffection they foment. Ignorance, which it is folly to suppose a protection to society, makes the poor greedy to believe that a corrupt government regards them as slaves, that "they are a flogged nation, and flogging is only fit for beasts, and beasts they are, and like beasts they deserve to be treated, if they submit patiently to such wrongs and insults;—these are the topics which are received in the pot-house, and discussed over the loom and the lathe: men already profligate and unprincipled, needy because they are dissolute, and dissolute because they are needy, swallow these things when they are getting drunk, and chew the cud upon them when sober."

With the theory that such conditions are an unavoidable incident to the working out of natural economic law, Southey has no patience. The manufacturing system increases revenue and decreases well-being; the business of the state should be to use revenue to augment well-being. A false view of human nature had been suggested by Adam Smith. Englishmen had come to assume, Southey says in 1828, that their prosperity rested upon cotton, that human beings were born to manufacture it and to wear it, that man was a manufacturing animal, and that children were created to feed power-looms. So fourteen years earlier he had asserted that Adam Smith estimated the importance of man, not by

the goodness or knowledge he possessed, not by his virtues, his duties, his capacities for happiness, the infinite possibilities of his nature, but by the gain, the "quantum of lucre," which could be extracted from him. "This philosophy, indeed, deals with him as Diogenes did with the cock, in derision of Plato's definition: pluck the wings of his intellect, strip him of the down and plumage of his virtues, and behold in the brute, denuded, pitiable animal, the man of the manufacturing system."

Upon Malthus, of course, the full weight of Southey's wrath more than once descends. There are minds, he says, that delight in garbage, and Malthus's is one of them. The latter's theory of the relation of food to population was an old and obvious truth, but whatever in his statement of it was true was not applicable so long as the earth was not fully populated, and whatever was applicable was not true. An enlightened people would of course practice continence, but if people were not enlightened, if more people existed than could be fed, the fault was not in nature but in the policy of governments. The folly, the ignorance, the errors, the wickedness of men were not to be attributed to an evil god or to a necessity more powerful than a good one. Malthus had said that nature, having provided only so many covers to her feast, superfluous and uninvited guests had better stay away or not complain at going hungry. What, asks Southey, if the uninvited guests should thrust themselves in, saying "you have had your turn at the table long enough, gentlemen, and if those who have no places are to starve, we will have a scramble for it at least." Nor will it suffice, he declares, to adopt, in place of the poor laws, a statute requiring the clergy to preach admonitory sermons at weddings on the virtues of continence and the wickedness of begetting children which nature can so easily replace that the state has no interest in feeding them. A legislature which should pass such an act, he asserts, would be torn in pieces by the mob and deserve it. Far other is the true policy of governments, "not to prevent their subjects from



multiplying, but to provide uses and employments for them as fast as they multiply. If in any country they increase faster than means, not merely for their existence, but for their well-being are provided, in that country there is a defect of policy; the error is in human institutions, not in the unerring laws of nature; in man, not in his Maker."

This is the constant burden of Southey's criticism, but he does not therefore agree to the demands of political radicals. On the contrary he argues that such changes as parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation will do more harm than good. His early enthusiasm for the French Revolution, he declares, was based not so much on faith in the rights of man as in the hope "of rapid improvement and indefinite progression," an enthusiasm quenched when he saw that the political power of an ignorant populace was made the instrument, not of progress, but of tyranny. The prosperity of the United States, he maintains, was not due to the form of government but to conditions of life in a new and rich country where an unparalleled demand for labor existed among a sparse population. European countries were wholly different. Among them extension of the franchise would merely give votes to a people being daily rendered more unfit to use them wisely for their own good. Their power would be manipulated, not for the purpose of making the poor wiser, better, or richer, but for making the existing rich poorer. On the ruins of France had risen, not a more enlightened people, but Napoleon. On the ruins of English society would arise a rule of demagogues and in Ireland, at least, of priests. But the ruin would come first. The *vox dei* might be in the *vox populi*, but only in the sense that God was in the earthquake and the storm. And the storm past, the old problems would remain. The condition of the English people was not due to the form of English government, which, though parliamentary representation might be improved, was on the whole a fortunate compromise of differing interests. That government would only be weakened by sweeping political change. At the end of the

eighteenth century, Southey notes, only the educated classes had produced Jacobins; the poor rioted for church and king. If Jacobinism had now infected the lower classes, it was because economic and social change, accelerated by war, had rendered them easy prey for the political agitator. The remedy lay in better not in changed government, in laws that would improve the state of men's lives. To one such agitator, therefore, Southey declared that "the condition of the populace, physical, moral, and intellectual, must be improved, or a *Jacquerie*, a *bellum servile* will be the result. It is the people at this time who stand in need of reformation, not the government."

Now this position, that happiness, though its basis be social and economic, can best be promoted by change in the hearts rather than in the governments of men, is in some ways obviously the most extremely radical that can be taken. In taking it, therefore, Southey became, not the usual sort of reactionary nor the recalcitrant renegade, but one who went in one direction at any rate so far beyond the radicals of his day that he seemed to merge with the Tories. He says himself that he kept his face toward the sun as it moved. Macaulay says that he travelled to the antipodes and never saw the day. We may say that he swung so far to the left as to seem finally to stand upon the extreme right. There, however, he finds that, if the hearts of men are to be changed, someone must begin trying to change them, and persuasion, he concludes like Godwin, can bring about conversion. He concludes also, and perhaps not unreasonably, that those most amenable to persuasion are not the weak who desire power but the strong who already possess it. Having thus in a sense boxed the political compass, he proposes to the rich and the rulers of England that, from being pikes in the fishpond, they become saviors and evangelists to the little fish, that to the woes of society they apply a species of revolution as a remedy.

Those "real and radical reforms" which Southey urged naturally show less consistency and penetration than do his

criticisms of existing conditions. At times his suggestions point toward decentralization of society and industry in small communal units reminiscent of Godwin and pantisocracy but with less extravagance of theory. He was, therefore, deeply interested in the ideas and enterprises of Robert Owen. He saw in them nothing inherently impracticable. Their ill success he attributed to insufficient funds, and that lack to Owen's regrettable infidelity or at any rate to the latter's failure to enlist the support of some form of religious enthusiasm—even Unitarianism or Swedenborgianism might have served. In Owen himself Southey saw such a pantisocrat as he himself had been; if they had met in 1796 instead of in 1816, the meeting, he thought, might have been important for both. As it was, these were but occasional harkings back to Utopia, and he had to content himself for the most part with urging leadership in altruism upon the ruling classes in the form of a highly centralized paternalism. Government, he told them, should be not merely a police power, but a social agency of unlimited scope. The war had shown the possibility of borrowing on the public credit. Let the state borrow now for purposes of welfare as it had done for those of war. This would prevent the evils that might attend the too rapid liquidation of the national debt and encourage thrift. Savings banks would assist toward the same ends. Money thus raised—and the state, unlike individuals, could never have too much—should be used at once for great public works such as harbors, roads, and the reclamation of lands. The poor would thus be given employment; wages would take the place of poor relief; the general prosperity would be increased. A far more important duty, however, was the extension of the national church in order that the people might be brought up in the way they should go. The clergy should be increased and strengthened, new chapels built, and, taking a leaf from the book of the Romanists and the Wesleyans, ministers of the established religion should carry the gospel to the poor in mines and factories. In

close alliance with the church should go universal popular education, the immediate carrying out of which Southey somewhat innocently thought had been rendered feasible, if not inexpensive, by the system of mutual tuition devised by the Rev. Andrew Bell. Finally Britain should "cast her swarms," become the mother of a family of free nations within the empire, open up colonial lands, direct and encourage emigration.

These are Southey's larger proposals, but he was prolific in more specific suggestions as well. There should be economy in the administration of government, but public servants, especially in the lower ranks, should be adequately paid and made to feel secure in their positions. The army and navy, impressment abolished, should be recruited through schools for training common soldiers and sailors, increased pay in the service, rewards of merit, retiring allowances and pensions. Other proposals have more of the odd and amusing in them. Beguinages or protestant nunneries should be established to provide for indigent but respectable females. A system of elevated foot-paths should be built up and down the land in order that pedestrians may go dry and safe from the highway. Far less engaging is the shrill insistence that the popular press should be curbed, agitators put down, public-houses strictly limited and regulated, the Catholic church held in fear and abhorrence. Here we encounter that temper in Southey which could madly expect to exterminate Byron with a laureate's preface.

It would be idle now to expatiate upon these pleas for a kind of Anglican and Tory socialism. Certain conclusions are, however, clear. The radicalism of the youthful Southey had been in part the boyish expectation of Utopia through political revolution. The radicalism of the later Southey was the belief that progress depended on the state of men's hearts and minds, and that it could and should be brought about by the leaders and rulers of England. In the wisdom of the common people he had never had anything but the most

theoretical kind of faith; even his early epics turned upon the deliverance of the people at the hands of some "missioned" maid or hero whose power was for the people but of God. In the need of the people, however, and in the duty of serving that need, he believed with religious passion, and, be it said, with fanatic bad temper. Yet whatever in our conception of him derives from Byron or Macaulay has in it a large element of error. This is not the place at which to discuss either the man's weaknesses or his general reputation and influence, but it may be noted in conclusion that his true strength was perceived by Carlyle. The latter had approved, for reasons that should now be plain, of the writings which have here been discussed. He was, moreover, gratified in his surly way by the older man's warm commendation of his *French Revolution*. Both appear to have recognized that, in spite of wide difference in personal circumstances, each had the same faith at heart. Our last significant glimpse of Southey, therefore, quite appropriately comes from Carlyle. They sat together on a sofa in Henry Taylor's parlor, talking of the state of England. "It will not and it can not come to good," exclaimed Southey, and Carlyle perfectly assented.

WILLIAM HALLER